

DNREC's Brandywine Zoo caring for American alligator recovered during recent Pennsylvania drug bust

DOVER – DNREC's Brandywine Zoo assisted Chester County, Pa. law enforcement by taking into the zoo's care a two-foot-long, juvenile American alligator that was found inside a Coatesville, Pa. home during a Feb. 8 drug bust in the town some 40 miles northwest of Philadelphia.

The Brandywine Zoo agreed to house the alligator at the request of Chester County District Attorney Thomas P. Hogan, and it will become an educational animal for zoo visitors during the summer. Afterward, the alligator will be moved to the St. Augustine Alligator Farm and Zoological Park, an Association of Zoos and Aquariums-approved facility in Florida that loans the Brandywine Zoo alligators for its summer exhibit.

"We will provide care for the alligator and ensure it is healthy during its stay with the zoo," said Brandywine Zoo Director Brint Spencer. The zoo, managed by DNREC's Division of Parks & Recreation, "is glad we could be of assistance to Chester County law enforcement in placing the alligator in a healthy environment," he said.

The alligator was discovered as police in Chester County executed a search warrant at a home in Coatesville, and seized heroin, crack cocaine, suspected fentanyl, cash, and drug packaging materials. Police also found the alligator living in the kitchen of the residence. Three defendants in the case have been charged with drug trafficking and related offenses, and remanded to Chester County Prison.

“Chester County law enforcement deeply appreciates the assistance of zoo director Spencer and the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control,” said Chester County District Attorney Hogan. “The zoo and Director Spencer were immediately available to help us deal with the safe handling of the alligator. DNREC’s help provided us with both short-term and long-term placement of the alligator, making sure that it will be treated humanely.”

DNREC’s Brandywine Zoo is temporarily closed through the end of February while construction and improvement projects are made to the zoo’s campus in Wilmington. The zoo’s education building will remain open to host upcoming programs scheduled throughout the month.

The construction projects, undertaken ahead of implementing the zoo’s master plan for operations recently approved by DNREC’s Division of Parks & Recreation, include the conversion of the zoo’s otter exhibit into a new small animal contact area, and improvements to the honeybees and beehive educational display, and to the Andean condor exhibit. The improvement projects also include installation of new zoo signage, and renovation of the exhibit for the zoo’s South American capybaras – better known as the world’s largest living rodents.

Modifying the exhibits not only will enable the zoo to move some animals into upgraded facilities, but also helps the zoo to prepare for the arrival this spring of new species. Brandywine Zoo Director Spencer said that during construction, some of the animals are being shifted to zoo housing away from the construction work areas, where they will be fully engaged by keepers until returning to their exhibit space.

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